

Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly's Judiciary Committee

In support of Senate Bill No. 1019

March 10, 2021

Co-Chairs Sen. Winfield & Rep. Stafstrom; Ranking Members Sen. Kissel & Rep. Fishbein; and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee, I am writing **in support of S.B. No. 1019 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES, ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS FOR CERTAIN MISDEMEANOR AND FELONY OFFENSES, PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON ERASED CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORD INFORMATION AND CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO MISDEMEANOR SENTENCES.**

My name is Rev. James C. Manship, resident of Meriden, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, and a member of CONECT. I support SB 1019 for the automatic erasure of criminal records. Mass incarceration has had real, ongoing consequences in Connecticut, disproportionately hurting Black and brown communities in our state, and burdening hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents with a criminal record. Records present barriers to employment, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education. **9 in 10 employers, 4 in 5 landlords, and 3 in 4 colleges** use background checks. Clean Slate will automatically expunge the records of people who have served their time, returned to our communities, and remained crime-free. This legislation is a sensible way forward with regard to restorative justice principles for returning citizens. A criminal record should not be a lifetime sentence.

When a crime is committed, there must be justice for the victim as well as for society, as crime impacts all of us. While the rate of crime is falling, crime and fear of crime touch many of our lives and can polarize many communities. As I pastor, I have attended to victims of crime, families of both victim and offender, and have accompanied those who have done the time for their crime as they return to our community. How can we, as a community, respect law and life? How can we protect and rebuild communities, offer a road to reintegration for returning citizens, confront crime without vengeance?

A person can never simply be defined by any one thing in their lives, whether victim or criminal. Our personhood is so much more than that has happened to us, what we have done, or not done. I support the Clean Slate legislation, SB 1019, as a way forward for those members of my community who have paid their debt to society and are working to live their lives in dignity. SB 1019 provides for the extension of restorative justice to the returning citizen, allowing them to become active and fruitful members of society.

SB 1019 does not undermine law enforcement's ability to protect and serve the community, as they will have access to see a criminal record. This bill protects the common good, wellbeing of society, and victims as it excludes domestic/ family violence crimes.

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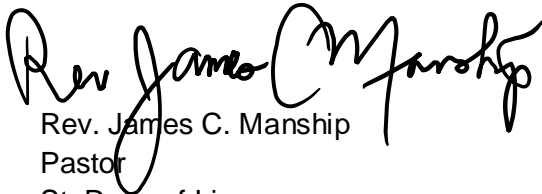
SB 1019-IN SUPPORT

Written testimony of Rev. James C. Manship

The image of Lady Justice is blindfolded, attesting to the ideal of an impartial system of justice. The history of our nation and state reveals that has not always been the case. A disproportionate number of African-Americans and Latinos continue to be locked up. SB 1019 provides a vehicle to address the systemic racism in which black people are 9.4% more likely than whites to be locked up and Latinos are 3.9x more likely to be incarcerated than whites.

As a faith leader, a leader in CONECT, and a citizen of this state, I see as one of my primary responsibilities is to restore a respect for all life, dignity of every person, a civil atmosphere, personal and communal responsibility for the common good, justice, and mercy to everyday life. SB 1019, Clean Slate, will provide returning citizens, me, and so many others with a tool to fulfill our collective responsibility for a more perfect union.

Without SB 1019, Connecticut will continue to punish thousands of people for years and decades after they have completed their sentences, limiting their access to work, housing, education, and more. I encourage all members of the Judiciary Committee, on both sides of the aisle, to support this important measure. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rev James C Manship". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Rev", "James", and "Manship" being capitalized and prominent.

Rev. James C. Manship
Pastor
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